



# THE PANCARATRAS OR BHAGAVATA-SASTRA



By A. Govindacarya Svamin, M.R.A.S.  
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## PART 1

1. The synonymy of what is well known as the PAnCarAtra is thus given in the PAdma-tantra (one of the 108 tantras or SamhitAs) :-

SURis suhrid bhAgavatas sAtvatah pancakAlavit |

EkAntikas tanmayas' ca pancarAtrika ity api || (iv, 2, 88)

From this it is evident that pAnCarAtra = BhAgavata = sAtvata = EkAntika.

2. The Sastra or Science (of the worship of the One Gog = Monotheism) is also called EkAyana, which means the Only Way (Monotheism). For, as is stated in Isvara SamhitA, NARada tells the Sages -

MoksAyanAya vai panthA etad anyo na vidyate |

TasmAd EkAyanam nAma pravadanti manIsinah || (i, 18)

i.e. "whereas there is no other Path than this One to Emancipation (moksa), the wise call this by the name EkAyana"

3. This science is also known as the MUla-Veda or Root Science (or Root knowledge), inasmuch as VAsudeva is at the Root of all Knowledge, as the following verse explicitly says -

Mahato Veda-vrksasya mUla-bhUto mahAn ayam |

Skandha-bhUtA Rg-AdyAs te sAkha-bhUtAs' ca yoginah ||

Jagan-mULasya Vedasya VAsudevasya mukhyatah |

PratipAdakatA siddhA MUla-VEdAkhyatA dvijAh ||

Adyam BhAgavatam dharmam Adi-bhUte krte yuge |

MANavA yogya-bhUtAs te anutisthanti nityas'ah || (Id. 1, 24-26)

i.e. "This (Science) is the root of the Veda-Tree; the Rg and others are its trunk and branches. The (science) is called by the name MUla-Veda (=Root-Veda), because it is an expositin of VAsudeva, the Root of the Universe. This is the original BhAgavata-Dharma which the krta age worthy men observed always"

4. That this Ancient Science is *Ancient*, and not originated by VAsudeva, the Son of Vasudeva = Kr\*shna, is evident from the word VAsudeva, meaning "He who permeates all", though, grammatically it is also a patronymic, viz, "Son of Vasudeva." For firstly, the word VAsudeva

occurs in the Taittiriya Upanisad passage known as the Visnu-GAyatri, Secondly, we have in the PAdma-Tantra -

Vasudeva-sutasyApi sthApanam VAsudeva-vat || (iii, 29, 28)

i.e. "The installation of the Son of Vasudeva (krsna) is like that of VAsudeva (the Ancient One)".

Thirdly, that the EkAyana Science is one of the Ancient Sciences learnt by NArada, is evident from what NArada himself tells SanatkumAra in the ChAndogya Upanisat -

" Rg-Vedam Bhagavo 'dhyemi Yajur-VEdam SAmA-Vedam Atharvanam caturtham IthihAsa-PurAnam pancamam VedAnAm Vedam Pitryam RAs'im Daivam Nidhim VAko-vAkyam EkAyanam." (vii, 1, 2)

i.e. "O SanatkumAra, I have learnt Rg-Veda, Yajur-Veda, SAmA-Veda Atharvanam, ..., EkAyanam."

Also, See the word occurring in the same Upanisat vii, 1, 4; 2, 1; 5, 2; 7, 1.

Fourthly, Sri Kr\*shna Himself says in the Bhagavat GIItA (vii, 19)-

VAsudevah sarvam iti sa mahAtmA sudurlabhah.

i.e. "That great soul is hard to find who knows 'VAsudeva is all';" Showing that the Bhagavata or VAsudeva religion was not originated or invented in Kr\*shna's days, but was existent from time primeval.

Further, Sri Kr\*shna confirms this position, viz., the eternity of the BhAgvata Religion, by telling Arjuna that what he taught him now was Ancient religion, which from time to time is forgotten by men, and He comes and revives it. Read Bhagavad-GItA, iv, 1-3 -

Imam Vivasvate yogam proktavAn aham avyayam ||  
VivasvAm Manave prAha manur IksvAkave 'bravit |  
Evam paramaparA-prAptam imam rAjarasyo viduh ||  
Sa kAlen-eha mahatA yogo nastah Parantapa |  
Sa ev-Ayam mayA te 'dya yogah proktah purAtanah ||

i.e. "It was I (the Ancient, not merely as Kr\*shna now) who taught this Devine Science (Yoga) to VivasvAn (The Sun). VivasvAn taught Manu; and Manu taught IksvAku. That this is thus traditionally derived, the Royal Sages know. But by long lapse of time the Science was lost. And this Ancient Science has again by Me now told thee, O Foe-dread (Arjuna)".

Here "Royal Sages Know" does not mean that only the Royal Sages or Kshatriyas know, and that BrAhmanas therefore do not know; nor does it mean that Kshatriyas originated it without reference to the BrAhmanas. Also, the term "Royal" is also interpretable as "those Sages who have attained royalty or eminence in the Devine Science"; and therefore need not necessarily mean Kshatriyas. Besides, if the Ancient, as He says, taught VivasvAn, may it be adduced from this that the Ancient was a Kshatriya, or that VivasvAn (the Sun) is a Kshatriya? It is simply NArAyana, the Primeval God, teaching NArada to begin with - NArada, the mind-born son of

BrahmA and therefore a divine BrAhmana (Brahmarishi) - as many be seen from Is'vara-SamhitA, i, 4, 11; -

NArAyanam tapasyantam Nara-NArAyanas'ramo  
SamsavantA sadA bhaktyA mokshopAya-vivitsavah  
SamsthitA munayas sarve NArAyaana-parAyanAh  
KAlena kena cit svargAt NArayana-didrkshayA  
TatrAvatIrya devar\*shih NAradas sa kutUhalah  
Dr\*shtvA NArayanam devam namaskr\*tya kr\*tAnjalih  
PulakAncita-sarvAngah prshr\*shta-vadano munih  
StitvA nAnAvidhaih stotraiH pranamya ca muhur muhuh  
PUjayAmAsa tam Devam NArAyanam anAmayam  
Atha NArAyaano devah tam Aha munipungavam  
Munayo hy atra tishthanti prArthayAnA Hareh padam  
EteshAm SATvatam s'Astram upadestum tvam arhasi  
Ityuktv-antardadhe Sriman-NArAyaana-munis tadA

i.e. "the Sages (munis) lovingly served NArAyaana absorbed in meditation at Nara-NArAyan-As'rama (Badari in the Himalayas). Wishing to see NArAyaana, NArada descended from Svarga; and seeing Him, prostrated and stood up with hands clasped, with joy beaming in his face and thrilling in his frame. He burst forth in praise, again and again casting himself at His feet. he worshiped (thus) the Holy NArAyaana. Then spake NArAyaana to the sage-chief thus: 'The Sages sit here praying for Hari's feet and Thou art fit to teach them the SATvata-Sastra (= PANca-rAtra).' So saying Sriman NArAyaana made Himself invisibile".

Also read BhAradvAja-SamhitA cited under par. 6 infra, as also iii, 41 (id.) and its Paris'ista, 1, 88.

As to the primordial or prmeval character of this BhAgavata (=VAsudevic or PAncarAtra) religion, further reference is invited to MahA-nArAyaana, Brahma-bindu, Mukti, RAmatApani and VAsudeva Upanisads.

5. That PAncarAtra is Vedic and possesses Authority (so that its precepts and practices are to be followed by all those who own allegiance to Veda) is expressed in the PADma-tantra verse -

S'ruti-mUlam idam Tantram pramAnam kalpa-sUtravat. (i, 1, 88.)

i.e. "This tantra is S'ruti-originated or S'ruti-rooted, and is an Authority like, for example, the Kalpa-S'utra".

6. The meaning of the term pAncarAtra is thus explained -

(a) PADma-tantra: The question is put -

Mahopanisad-Akhyasya s'Astrasya-Asya mahAmate !  
PancarAtra-samAkhy-Asau katham loke pravartate (i, 1, 681/2-69)

i.e. "How, O wise sire! is this Mahopanishad currently known in the world as PancarAtra? To which Samvarta is made to answer thus:-

Pan-etarAni s'AstrAni rAtriyante mahAnty api  
Tat-sannidhau samAkhyAsau tena loka pravartate.

i.e. "Because the five other great S'astras are like darkness in the presence of this (PancarAtra),  
thence is it currently known by the term PancarAtra".

The other Five S'astras are -

- (1) Yoga (author Virinca or Hiranya-garbha)
- (2) Sankhya (author kapila)
- (3) Buddha (author Buddhi-mUrti)
- (4) Arhata (author Arhata or Jina)
- (5) KApAla, Suddha-S'aiva, PAsupata (a group-author S'iva).

or it may be also thus interpreted:-

Pancatvam athavA yadvat dipyamAne divAkare  
Rcchanti rAtrayas tadvat itarAni tad-antike.

i.e. "As when the Sun rises, the nights die, so others die in the vicinity of this (PancarAtra)".

(b) NArada-PancarAtra

RAtram ca jnAna-vacanam jnAnam panca-vidham smr\*tam  
TEdnam Panca-rAtram ca pravadanti manishinah. (i, 1, 44)

i.e. "RAtram is a term signifying knowledge and because of this there are five (panca) kinds,  
therefore the wise call it *Panca-rAtram*".

The five kinds of knowledge (read op. cit., verses 45-56) are said to be:

- (1) Tattva (this is *sAttvika*)
- (2) Mukti-prada (also *sAttvika*)
- (3) Bhakti-prada (this is *nairgunya*)
- (4) Yaugika (this is *rAjasa*)
- (5) Vaishayika (this is *tAmasa*).

(c) Sri-Pras'na-SamhitA, ii, 40, states -

RAtrir ajnAnam ity uktam  
Panc-ety ajnAna-nAs'akam.

i.e. "RAtri, night, means nescience, and pane, derived from the root pac, to cook, means that  
which 'cooks', i.e. destroys that nescience". Hence PancarAtra is the science which dispels  
ignorance.

Also (d) Ahirbudhnya-Samhita xi-64, 65, 66 (?) and Kapinjala-Samhita, chap. 1, may be  
referred to.

7. The AcAryas or Teachers in succession who promulgated these doctrines (omitting  
NArAyana and NArada, vide par. 4 supra) are thus stated:

PuraA TotAdri-s'ikhare S'Andilyo 'pi mahA-munih  
 SamAhita-manA bhUtvA tapas taptvA mahattaram  
 AnekAni sahasrAni var\*shAnam tapaso 'ntatah  
 DvAparasya yugasy-Ante Adau kali-yugasya ca  
 SAkshAt SamkarshanAt labdhvA vedam EkAyanabhidam  
 Sumantum Jaiminim caiva Bhrgum caiva-AupagAyanam  
 MaunjyAyanam ca tam Vedam samyag adhyApayat purA (Is'vara-SamhitA, i, 38-41)

i.e. "In days past, on TotAdri peak, S'Andilya the great sage sat fixed in severe austerities (tapas) for many years. In the end he obtained from Samkarshana - in the interim between DvApara age and kali age- the Veda going by the name of EkAyana, and taught them well to Sumantu, Jaimini, Bhrgu, AupagAyana and MaunjyAyana".

And then in viii, 175-7, of the same Samhita, NArada tells -  
 EkAntino mahAbhAgAh S'athakopa-purassarAh  
 KshonyAm kr\*r-AvatArA ye lokojjIvana-hetunA  
 S'AndilyAdyAs' ca ye c-Anye PancarAtra-pravartakAh  
 PrahlAdas' c-aiva SugrIvo VAYusUnur VibhUshanah  
 Ye c-Anye SanakAdyAs' ca PancakAla-parAyanah

i.e. "Sathakopa and others, great devout saints, became incarnate on earth to save creature. Sanaka and others, Sandilya and others, prahalAda, SugrIva, the Wind-Son (HanumAn), VibhIshana and others - the strict observers of the Five Timed Injunctions (PancakAla)- these are the Promulgators of the PancarAtra.

With reference to SandilyA, attention is invited to No 10, SAndilya-VidyA and No. 32 S'riman NyAsa-VidyA in the Table of the 32 VidyAs, pp 129-30 of our Bhagavad-GItA with RAmAnuja's Commentary.

Next, after Sathakopa and others, comes RAmAnuja. For NArAyana tells Bala-bharads (or Bala-rAma, the brother of Kr\*shna) thus (Is'vara SamhitA, xx, 278-80):

Asti te vimalA bhaktih Mayi YAdava-nandana |  
 Prathamam S'esha-rUpo Me kaimkaryam akarod bhavAn ||  
 Tatas tu Lakshmano bhUtvA MAM ArAdhitvAn iha |  
 IdAnIm api MAM yastum Balabhadra ! tvam arhasi ||  
 kalAv api yuge bhUyah kas'eid bhUtavA dvijottamah |  
 NAnA-vidhair bhoga-jAlair arcanam Me karishyasi ||

i.e. "O Son of Yadu-race (BalarAma) ! thou hast clean (or pure) devotion (or love) for Me. Thou, first as S'esha didst the great service for Me. Then next didst thou worship me as Lakshmana. Thou art now serving me as Balabharada. Thou shalt again in Kali age be born as a great BrAhmana (=RAmAnuja), and shalt worship me with many things of joy".

Br\*had-Brahma-SamhitA makes this clear, thus:

Dvija-rUpena bhavitA yA tu SamkarshanAbhidhA ||  
 DvAparAnte kaler Adan pAsanda-pracure jane |

RAmAnuj-eti bhavitA Vishnu-dharma-pravartakah ||  
 S'riranges'a-dayA-pAtram viddhi RAmAnuja munim |  
 Yena sandarsitah panthA VaikunthAkhyasya sadmanah ||  
 PAram-aikAntiko dharmo bhava-pAs'a-vimocakah |  
 Yatr-AnanyatayA proktam Avayoh pAda-sevanam ||  
 KAlen-AchhAdito dharmo madIyo 'yam varAnane ! |  
 TadA mayA pravrtto 'yam tat-kAl-Ocita-mUrtinA ||  
 VishvakSen-Adibhir bhaktair S'athAri-pramukhair dvijaih |  
 RAmAnujena muninA kalau samsthAm upeshyati ||

i.e. " 'My Samkarshana part (O Sri),' says NArAyan, 'is the form of a BrAhmana, by the name RAmAnuja, which it is going to take, after the DvApara age and in the kAlI age, to expound the Vishnu-dharma (=BhAgavata Religion), when the world will be full of heretics or renegades (pAsanda). Know that RAmAnuja will be the specially favoured of S'riRanga (-natha) and he will show the way to the Realm known as Viakuntha. The One-pointed Religion exclusively to be rendered to Thee and Me (=Sriman NArAyana) the religion which delivers (creatures) from the bonds of samsAra (material existence) becomes dimmed by age, O fair faced one ! According to the requirements of the age, I take many forms, and act by means of My devotees such as VishvakSena, Sathakopa, etc., and RAmAnuja in the Kali age."

BhAradvAja-SamhitA iv, 92, teaches -  
 Abhyarthito jagad-dhAtryA S'riyA NArAyanas svayam  
 UpAdis'ad imam yogam iti me NAradAt s'rutam,  
 i.e "Prayed to by Sri, the Universal Mother, NArAyana Himself taught (Her) this yoga. So did I hear from NArada".

From the above it will be seen how the hierarchy (Guru-paramparA) of the S'ri-Vaishnavas or Sri-Sampradhayam came to be constituted thus:

- (1) NArAyana
- (2) S'ri
- (3) VishvakSena = Senes'a = the Lord of the Hosts (the Eternals)
- (4) S'athakopa or S'athagopa (the Mortal-Immortal)
- (5) The others between (4) and (6)
- (6) RAmAnuja
- (7) Succession after (6), up to one's own Holy Preceptor.

In the work called VArta-mAlA (or Garland of Talks), p 98, 202nd Talk (Telugu edition, Madras, 1887, SarasvatI-BhandAra Press), a question was asked how the efficaciousness of the Apostolic Pedigree would be affected